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# COLONEL WILKS AND NAPOLEON









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COLONEL WILKS  
AND  
NAPOLEON





COLONEL WILKS

AND

NAPOLEON

TWO CONVERSATIONS HELD AT  
ST. HELENA IN 1816

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY  
JULIAN S. CORBETT

LONDON  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET  
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## COLONEL WILKS AND NAPOLEON

“**B**ERTRAND,” says Lord Rosebery, in describing the little circle that surrounded Napoleon at St. Helena, “Bertrand had an agreeable singularity : he wrote no book.” A scarred biographer will sympathise with Lord Rosebery’s sentiment, and any one can appreciate Bertrand’s self-control. The great prisoner offered a subject so enticing, and life on the island was so dull, that a man who could resist the temptation to write a book could probably have resisted anything. But Bertrand was not the only St. Anthony. There was another beside him—a man whose temptation was even greater than Bertrand’s. For not only had he exceptional opportunities of observation, but he was also a man of letters and might have been the first in the field.

This man was Colonel Mark Wilks, who was Governor of the island under the East India Company when Napoleon landed. In Lord Rosebery’s book he is so little noticed as even to have escaped with other minor characters the vigilance of the indexer. It is natural enough. Beyond the fact that Napoleon liked and respected him during the few months they were thrown together, little or nothing was known of his influence on the story. Indeed, the two men had but the

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slightest official relations with one another, for, since Wilks was merely a servant of the Company, it was thought better that, until Sir Hudson Lowe came out, Napoleon should remain in the custody of the naval officer who brought him to the island. So admirable was the Colonel's reserve that it was not suspected that he had caught the prevailing epidemic of making notes, or that he had left behind him any account of what he thought of Napoleon and the behaviour of his suite. Yet so it was; and some at least of the material he prepared has come to light in the custody of his lineal representative, Sir Mark Wilks Collet, Bart., of St. Clere, by whose kind permission it is now, for the first time, printed below.

But before examining the contents of his papers we will try to get a grasp of the man's personality to help us. He was born in the Isle of Man about 1760, received a classical education, and was intended for the ministry; but eventually finding his bent in a different direction, he obtained a cadetship under the East India Company. Thenceforward his career was one eminently calculated to fit him for the delicate task which he was not allowed to undertake. Almost the whole of his service was spent in staff or political employ. He was military secretary to two Governors and one Commander-in-Chief, and was on General James Stuart's staff during his operations against Tippoo from 1790 to 1792. His last appointment had been that of Resident at Mysore, a post he held from 1802 to 1808. He was then invalided home, and set to work on his book, the first volume of which was published in 1810, under the title of "Historical Sketches of the South of India, in an attempt to trace the history of Mysore." Sir James Macintosh, who was then the greatest authority, though he never got his own history written, thought very highly of the book. He

even claimed to be its sponsor, and pronounced it to be "the first example of a book on Indian history founded on a critical examination of testimony and probability, and from which the absurdities of fable and etymology are banished." He went so far as to say it marked an era in that branch of literature. Much of the praise was doubtless deserved, for the work was founded on an examination of the native archives to which Wilks had access as Resident at Mysore, while in the later stages he himself had assisted at the making of the history he recorded. It was in the midst of these literary labours that he was called on to take over the Governorship of St. Helena, and in June 1813 he entered upon the duties of the office. He had thus been out some two years when Napoleon landed, and during that time had succeeded in winning the devotion of the islanders by his improvements in agriculture and by inducing the Company to ameliorate the system of land tenure. His interest in agriculture, science, and history comes out strongly in the notes of his conversations with Napoleon, and, according to his obituary notice in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, he was a Fellow of the Royal Society. His power of interesting the bored Emperor is equally clear, although they had to speak through an interpreter. On one occasion an English lady who was present declared that "Bonaparte became animated to excess, and appeared almost a supernatural being."

In 1815 he was almost fifty-five years of age, and is thus described by the same lady, who was, we believe, Mrs. Young-husband, the accomplished wife of an officer in the 53rd Regiment, then in garrison on the island: "He was," she writes, "a tall, handsome, venerable-looking man, with white curling locks and a courtier-like manner. . . . Never had the island of St. Helena, since its first possession by the English, been

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under the government of a man so enlightened, so judicious, so mild and affable, or so much beloved."

Such a man could hardly have stood in greater contrast to the officer who superseded him, and it is no wonder that when the troubles began to be felt many people thought, like the Duke of Wellington, that if Wilks had been retained there would have been a different story to tell. Sir Hudson Lowe, so far from being a polished scholar, or from having by his career acquired the tact and tone that was needed to deal with such men as Napoleon and his suite, was of just the stuff that went to make the old soldiers of fortune. The son of an army surgeon, he was born and bred in a barrack. He began soldiering, at the age of twelve, in a militia regiment, and the bulk of his service had been spent abroad in making soldiers out of some of the wildest and most untamable material in Europe. In short, he was the typical officer of cosmopolitan auxiliaries, and such was his success that tact of some kind he must certainly have possessed, though doubtless he owed most to his stern discipline, his mastery of foreign languages, and his untiring devotion to hard work. In any case, he had earned for himself the reputation of a man singularly successful in dealing with foreigners, and had come to be regarded at headquarters as a kind of inspector-general of mercenaries. In 1814 he had served under Blücher, and, attended by a single Cossack, he had ridden across France to bring to London the first news of the fall of Paris. It was on this occasion that he was knighted. The following year he was again inspecting mercenaries in Holland, and, after serving a short time as Quartermaster-General on the Duke of Wellington's staff, he was sent off to the scene of his old successes in the Mediterranean. Here he distinguished himself by getting possession of Marseilles, and

received a handsome testimonial from the citizens in acknowledgment of the humanity and skill he had displayed in saving the place from a sack. This was not the first time his "humanity" had attracted public attention, nor was it the last, for it was he who abolished slavery in St. Helena.

It is clear, then, that the man can have been no mere vulgar martinet. In the face of the reputation he had won, and the difficult tasks that were habitually committed to him, it would be hasty in the extreme to explain his behaviour to Napoleon in this way alone. Colonel Wilks's notes suggest a more reasonable explanation. But before we can understand the significance of what he records, we must see exactly what Lowe's position was when he took up his arduous duties. It is here perhaps that Lord Rosebery's careful study is least satisfactory. Nothing is more difficult for the most highly experienced historian than the effort of putting himself into the exact state of mind of the men about whom he writes. He has resolutely to shut his eyes to all they did not know, and his judgment to every sentiment that was not a sentiment of the time. Everything that has happened since the events in question must be forgotten, or we are certain to do some injustice to men who could only shape their course by what was within their experience. It is to be feared that in this effort Lord Rosebery has not achieved his habitual success. We cannot feel with full confidence that he has entered with clear historical sympathy into the state of mind in which Lord Bathurst made the unhappy appointment, or in which Lowe received it. He has indeed given us plenty of evidence that in 1815 Napoleon was a man broken in health and spirit and no longer a power to be feared. This may be true. Yet we cannot forget that the man who is still the most command-



ing figure in Central Asia was long ago reported on in exactly the same way ; and what, we may ask, would now be thought of the Indian Government if it had based its Afghan policy on the assumption that the Ameer's powers were exhausted ? But, more than this, what Lord Rosebery has failed to give us is evidence that Lord Bathurst and his colleagues knew of Napoleon's condition, or that they ought to have known of it, or that, if they had known of it, the knowledge would have availed to outweigh the tremendous impression his personality could still enforce. We in these days have outgrown the oppression of his name, and can soberly consider evidence on the point ; but in 1815 Napoleon was still an Alexander, a Tamburlane. He was still a force that could not be measured, a magician whose powers no man could pretend to have fathomed. They had tried to cage him once and had failed ; and now Lord Bathurst found himself saddled with a repetition of the task from which every statesman in Europe shrank. If he exaggerated its difficulties, have we the right to deride him ? How was he to bind the whirlwind ? Every one knew the prisoner's capacity for subtle political influence and the tiger-like fascination of his gentler moods. Few had been able to match or resist him. How, then, could he be prevented from bringing his illusive powers to bear on the dangerous forces that were still heaving with the storm, and where could be found a keeper who could be trusted to remain impervious to his charm ? Which of us in Lord Bathurst's position would have left a courtly scholar like Wilks at the point of danger ? Which of us would not have used such a man as Lowe if we had had him at hand ? And which of us, called as Lowe was from the midst of the contending passions that surged round him at Marseilles, would not have gone out to the task



oppressed and hardened by a sense of the intangible danger that had to be faced?

With this picture in our minds, and our eyes resolutely shut to the fact that Europe was going to settle down quietly, which nobody then knew, let us see how Lowe came to St. Helena. Lord Bathurst had made up his mind, and that very naturally, that the only way to make the situation safe was absolutely to isolate the demon of unrest, to prevent any kind of communication between him and the outer world except through the hands of the Governor. And Lowe must have felt that the only way to prevent himself from being gradually enticed from the execution of his orders was rigidly to pin himself to their strictest letter. It was stupid if you will, but it was exactly the kind of stupidity that at the close of the Cromwellian period had enabled a plain soldier of fortune to give peace and stability to England, after all the clever people had tried and failed. Such a rigid line as Lowe took up is not, of course, so simple as it looks. It is so easily brought to a *reductio ad absurdum*. As General Monk himself would have said, "He that follows duty too close on the heels is like to have his teeth kicked out." No one can have known this better than Napoleon and his suite, and few will doubt that they deliberately intended to manœuvre their victim into impossible positions. The wonder is that they did not entirely succeed. Lord Bathurst's chief mistake was that he had not thought of the danger. Probably he only considered, as any other man would have done in those days, that to set a custodian to match his arts against Napoleon's was the height of folly. Blind unreasoning obedience to orders seemed the only sure defence. For this reason, there can be no doubt, Lowe was chosen, and in this spirit he came to St. Helena.

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That he meant well every one agrees. One of his first acts was to increase the exile's allowance, but, when it came to a question of the prisoner's isolation, he was from the first rough and overbearing. Lord Rosebery has found his suspicions unreasonable and difficult to account for. The importance of Colonel Wilks's testimony is that it goes far to explain Lowe's attitude. For we now know on unimpeachable evidence that the new governor's first experience on landing was that an attempt was being made to get behind his orders by tampering with his predecessor, as well as with the officer in command of the naval squadron.

Lowe landed on April 14, 1816, and on the 21st Wilks was to pay his farewell visit to Napoleon. The day before the visit took place Bertrand, to Wilks's surprise, called upon him and coolly asked whether he would take home a communication from Napoleon without letting Lowe see it. Wilks was at no pains to conceal his disgust, but before he could let Bertrand know fully what he thought of him, they were interrupted. He, of course, thought it necessary to inform Lowe what had taken place, and Lowe begged him, before seeing Napoleon the following day, to call on Bertrand "with a view," as he says, "of remonstrating with him on this kind of proceeding." This he did, but Bertrand was out. He saw Las Cases, however, and appears to have expressed himself with considerable freedom. "Amongst other arguments," he says, "I observed to him that if anything could possibly induce the officer charged with their custody to adopt measures of farther restraint, it would be their attempts at concealed communication." It is clear, therefore, that Wilks took the same serious view as Lowe did of these attempts, to which Lord Rosebery attaches so little importance. He seems, however, to have been quite unable to

get Las Cases to admit his error, and, as he puts it, "a great deal of bad argument only terminated in the conclusion that they would think differently in France." But this was not all. As soon as Wilks was shown in to Longwood, Napoleon assailed him on the same subject, but the well-bred Colonel fenced so cleverly that no actual request was made. It was evident, however, that what Napoleon was bent on was to make a personal appeal to the Prince Regent behind the back of the Ministers, the thing of all others they wished to avoid; but so unresponsive was Wilks that all the Emperor could do was to taunt him on the way in which the English were losing their boasted independence of character, and to assure him that no French officer in his position would have any scruple in transmitting "a sealed letter from a prisoner to his sovereign." Wilks at once pointed out that this happened to be against express orders, but Napoleon refused to be convinced, and gave him to understand that in France it was considered nobler to follow your feelings than your orders. The conversation then wandered to corporal punishment in the British Services, of which Napoleon frequently spoke with disapproval, and then to Indian history, the Colonel's pet subject. This was one of his favourite tricks. "He possessed," wrote Captain Maitland, of the *Bellerophon*, "to a wonderful degree a facility in making a favourable impression upon those with whom he entered into conversation: this appeared to me to be accomplished by turning the subject to matters he supposed the person he was addressing was well acquainted with, and on which he could show himself to advantage." After preparing the ground by this subtle manœuvre, Napoleon returned to the charge by asking whether the oppressive system of excluding private ships from the island was to be continued. The Colonel, however,

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was still adamant, and Napoleon had to content himself with abusing the navy in a way that was hardly well-mannered. Wilks might well have resented his rudeness, but he was too much of a courtier to be angered, and they parted amicably.

All that had passed, both with Las Cases and Napoleon, was, of course, reported to Lowe, and thus he found himself at the very outset confronted with what was little short of a declaration of war. On a matter which to both Wilks and Lowe seemed highly reprehensible and even insulting, the exiles were impenitent and plainly intended to have their way if they could. It can hardly be said, therefore, that the original provocation came from Lowe. No doubt, if he had been a man of Wilks's stamp, he would have treated the matter with greater skill and made less of it, but it must not be forgotten that in all probability he was chosen mainly because he was not a man of Wilks's stamp. That Lowe's suspicions afterwards grew exaggerated and excessive cannot be denied. Undoubtedly the responsibility of his position, the sense of the personality that was defying him, and the efforts that were continually made to break down his attitude of blind obedience, came to overweight his mind, and he behaved at times like a madman. None the less, in his blundering honest way, he did his duty as a good servant to England. It is also true that in some quarters his excesses may have made his country a laughing-stock: he may have covered the policy of his masters with disgrace; but which of the Powers that left another to bear their burden shall cast the first stone?

This view of the unfortunate Lowe, which Wilks's notes recall, is no new one. It was held almost universally by our grandfathers, and expressed by them with the breezy heartiness of the time. Here, for instance, is how it appears in a popular

“Treasury of Biography,” which may be taken as a fair index of opinions held by what we now call “the man in the street”:

For his conduct in this truly difficult and delicate matter Sir Hudson Lowe has been much abused by French writers, and we are sorry to say their abuse has been echoed in England by men who ought to have known better. . . . When to the stern sense of duty of a veteran soldier we add the vast additional sense of responsibility that must needs arise from the fact of the peace of Europe—nay, of the whole civilised world—being dependent on the safe custody of Napoleon, it is mere drivelling, to say no worse, to contend against the strictest fulfilment of the Governor’s sworn duty.

We can afford to smile at such vehemence now, but it was different then. The old fires are burning out, and we no longer speak of drivelling or whatever is worse. On the contrary, whether or not we are able to endorse fully Lord Rosebery’s strictures, we can be intelligently grateful that he has shown the world once more how, for all their pride of race, Englishmen are not ashamed to sweep out an ugly corner in their history and confess their fault. Such things tend to heal the sores of nations, and if Lord Rosebery’s work does somewhat in this direction, we may be sure that stout old Sir Hudson Lowe would be the last to complain.

A word remains to be said of the documents themselves. They relate, as will be seen, to two interviews with Napoleon, the first and the last that Wilks had of any importance. How many more took place is uncertain, but we know there was at least one other of which notes were taken. The officer’s wife already referred to records that, while she was staying at the Governor’s country house a short time before Lowe came out, she was asked to accompany to Longwood the beautiful Miss Wilks, whom her father was going to present to Napoleon. It was on this occasion that the Emperor “appeared almost as a

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supernatural being." But the subject of the conversation, which lasted two hours, remains untold. Both ladies were requested by Colonel Wilks to take notes of what they heard, and they did so independently. After the interview he took both sets of notes and never returned them. "Therefore," the lady concludes, "farther the deponent sayeth not." It will be seen that the Colonel records the presence of four ladies at his farewell visit, and this gives additional authority to the document, since the inference is that, as at the last interview, one or more of them took notes on the spot, from which Wilks afterwards refreshed his memory in making his own report.

With regard to the first interview, its main interest lies in Napoleon's remarks about India, which, it is believed, are found nowhere else. His cunning attempt to pervert history by trying to make the historian of Mysore believe he had received certain communications from Tippoo should be specially noted. The work of Lord Valentia, the travelling nobleman who behaved so queerly about the presents, was published magnificently, in 1809, in three volumes, royal quarto. It was entitled "Voyages and Travels in India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia, and Egypt, in the years 1802-6." For the rest, the documents may now be left to speak for themselves.

JULIAN S. CORBETT.



# I

ST. HELENA, 21st January, 1816.

In a visit to Buonaparte yesterday, the conversation took a turn so different from the usual train of rapid imperial questions, that I have thought it worth the trouble to note the principal features. I had been indisposed with gout, and he commenced with asking whether there were any other remedy than patience ; I adverted to the *can médicinale* as affording immediate relief with dangerous consequences : such he said was the account he had heard of it, but he understood that I employed other means with some success ; were they also unsafe ? Regimen, I said, was among the best means, but I had also for the last two years and a half found small doses of magnesia combined with the citric acid an effectual, and I hoped a very safe, preventive against painful paroxysms.

*B.* Ah ! you have faith in medical chemistry. I have always maintained in the institute that the application of chemistry to the living subject was altogether visionary : Medicine is not entitled to be classed as a science. It is a mere Babel, full of unintelligible confusion and incessant change : there are no principles : we see effects, but are ignorant of causes and their modes of operation.

*W.* Without doubt it was a visionary expectation that the laws of ordinary chemistry would apply to the living subject :

and that the principle of life—the animal chemistry—of which we must perhaps be content to remain for ever ignorant, was to be reckoned as nothing. But although an absurd application of that science has been attempted, and medicine itself is subject to the opprobrium of changing its fashions, it would be hard to degrade it from its rank as a science, because we cannot trace the connexion between cause and effect; a connexion of which we are equally ignorant in every other branch of human knowledge. Science is no more than an orderly arrangement of facts: and facts which invariably follow each other are distinguished as cause and effect, without our being able to explain the connexion between them. In this respect the facts in medicine may be multiplied and classed with the same advantage, although not with the same certainty, as in other sciences, from the varying nature of the living object, and the legitimate application of chemistry to medicine is merely to encrease the number of our facts.

*B.* Our opinions are not far removed from each other. I have less respect than you have for the quackery of medicine: its application to the laws of animal life is absurd and contradictory. Of the chemical agents themselves, there are some of which no intelligible explanation can be given. Electricity, light, heat, which we consider as properties of matter, are involved in darkness as profound as the connexion between mind and matter.

*W.* Of which we shall certainly never be better informed in this state of existence: but it is not altogether so hopeless to look for further illustrations of the nature of light, heat and electricity, and regarding these subtle agents it does not seem to be as yet determined whether we ought to consider them as mere properties of matter.



*B.* We had lately one of your chemists in France—I forget his name.

*W.* Davy?

*B.* The same. There is also another English chemist of great name—Candish.

*W.* Cavendish, perhaps.

*B.* That is the name. To which of the two do you give the preference?

*W.* They can scarcely be deemed cotemporaries, and chemistry is so new as a science, and so rapidly progressive, that we ought to render great homage to the more early discoveries, of which some of importance belong to Cavendish. The combination of the two gases to produce water, afterwards so perfectly and beautifully exhibited by Lavoisier, was, I believe, first ascertained by Cavendish.

*B.* We do not admit his priority in that discovery: we claim to be the authors of the modern chemistry; but I believe your chemists of the present day are superior to ours.

*W.* I did not mean to claim a superiority for ours. There are great living names in France, in England, and in Sweden. My recollection may be wrong with regard to the experiment of Cavendish, and we willingly acknowledge Lavoisier and his coadjutors to be the fathers of modern chemistry.

*B.* I do not like their nomenclature. The chemical term “affinity” is objectionable. “Attraction” would be better, for Berthollet has shown that chemical combination depends on the amount of the mass presented.

*W.* I think both terms objectionable. “Affinity” because it is a fixed principle that substances which enter into chemical combination are necessarily dissimilar; and “attraction” because it is certainly of a very different nature from the

Newtonian attraction, with which Berthollet's doctrine has a tendency to confound it. Davy, however, has shown the doctrine of Berthollet to be erroneous, and that all bodies which enter into chemical combination invariably combine in definite proportions, which are multiples or divisors of each other.<sup>1</sup>

*B.* That is an important discovery. I am satisfied that you have at this day a few chemists superior to any in France. But the science is not equally diffused.

*W.* I conclude that your Polytechnic school has essentially increased this diffusion. In England our Universities are but just beginning to acknowledge its importance.

*B.* The Polytechnic school has produced six thousand chemists classed in the first order, besides an immense number of various degrees of pretension.

*W.* When science is directed by the hand of power its effects must necessarily be extensive.

*B.* D'Arcet has been in England to report on the state of your manufactures: he describes everything to be performed in profound ignorance of chemical principles, but with a degree of manual skill, dexterity, and finish which we cannot approach. Your steel is far superior to ours. Is that an accidental discovery?

*W.* Far from it. *Mushet*, to whom we are indebted for most of the late improvements, is a man of profound science and has reduced to fixed principles the application of *carbon* for the conversion of iron into steel of all the various qualities required in the several manufactories.

*B.* [After some slight observations on *carbon*.] Your

<sup>1</sup> N.B.—I omitted to state that they are also invariably in opposite states of electricity.

*carbon* (coal) gives you an advantage we cannot possess in France. But the high price of all the articles of prime necessity is a great disadvantage in the export of your manufactures.

*W.* High prices—taxes—war—that is the series of causes and effects. Our taxes at present operate as a dead weight on our heads and hands, but we hope for gradual relief.

*B.* Your manufacturers are emigrating fast to America, and so they are from France.

*W.* From England, certainly. I did not know they had been emigrating from France.

*B.* In great and increasing numbers.

*W.* That is destined to be a great country if it hold together.

*B.* In a century—or perhaps half a century—more, it will give a new character to the affairs of the world. *It has thriven upon our follies* [twice repeated with emphasis].

*W.* The follies of France and England, certainly; but the primitive folly and injustice of England. If her separation be an evil, it is one of our own creating.

*B.* It might have been postponed for a time, but sooner or later it would have happened. The boy must in time become a man. He must some time or other cease to sleep with his mother. Is such an event likely to happen with your Indian possessions?

*W.* It is scarcely possible, from the same causes, for we do not colonize in India.

*B.* And what is the explanation of your not colonizing? Is no one disposed to colonize? Does the climate oppose it? I have observed that after two generations in warm climates the physical powers of Europeans degenerate.

*W.* Many would be disposed to colonize, but all who could

afford it would send the children to England in their 7<sup>th</sup> year as they now do: no climate can be more favorable to European children before that age, nor worse after it. But there is a law which prevents colonization, and by a separate operation promotes the permanency of our power. The East India Company has the exclusive honor of prohibiting all Englishmen from being the possessors of land in India. If this law did not exist our native subjects would be everywhere oppressed, and our European subjects by this time in rebellion. It is made a serious question whether our Eastern possessions do us any good. If we want to get rid of them we have only to colonize.

*B.* But how does it happen that the Indians are so *luche* as to allow you to remain: are they in intellect and physical powers no better than Africans?

*W.* I have little personal experience of the intellect of Africans: it is said to be respectable. I know that of the Hindoos to be equal to our own: the physical powers are certainly inferior to those of Europeans: but the courage of the military classes is of a high order.

*B.* Then do you reckon your sepoy troops equal to Europeans?

*W.* I think I have explained that in one respect they are inferior, in some others the best of them are, at least, equal: they are more patient, and more tractable—in point of bravery, they may be described to have less active energy and more passive courage. But our sepoys are degenerating, because we every day find it more and more difficult to get men of the higher classes to engage in our service, some points of importance, and many more belonging to the martinet (who is seldom a man of intellect) imposes restraints to which they will not submit.

It was difficult, and involved many appropriate questions with their answers in great detail, to make him understand why the lower classes in India, as well as in other countries, could not be made as good soldiers as the higher; and why the Bramins, while disliking our power, did not incite the people to drive us from India. It was explained that the Bramins, although like other priests, detesting whatever impeded their own march to temporal power and wealth, held the dogma that all religions proceeded from God, and were good for those to whom they were revealed. That the people felt strongly the superior mildness and justice of our Government: and still remembered the tyranny from which we had rescued them: that when these remembrances should abate or entirely pass away, the natural desire to be governed by themselves rather than by strangers might prevail, and if a great character should arise among them might also be successful. He was minute in his enquiries regarding the several classes and the manner in which their religious dogmas bore upon their political conduct, regarding their characteristic virtues and vices, and among the latter regarding some of which he has himself been accused. It was at this part of the conversation that he asked whether I had read Lord Valentia's work, intimating that he had himself seen it, and enquiring my opinion regarding its merits.

*W.* Its pretensions are not of a high order; it cannot be deemed a work of authority.

*B.* How! Are not his facts correct? Even if he be ill-informed, are we not to consider him as authority for what he saw?

*W.* For mere objects of vision I suppose we may; but he approached his subject with so little previous information that he perpetually misrepresents, because he misapprehends, and

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we cannot reasonably expect much from a person who travels full speed through a country.<sup>1</sup>

*B.* What was the political object of his mission to India? By whom and for what purpose was he deputed?

*W.* He came as a simple individual by licence of the East India Company, professedly to investigate the natural history of the country.

*B.* And did he go to the courts and make expensive presents in that pursuit? Is he a man of overgrown fortune, or what are we to understand by these presents?

*W.* That they were not his own.

*B.* You speak in enigmas—explain if there be no secret.

*W.* When he arrived at Calcutta, and stated to Lord Wellesley his wish to visit the different courts, his Lordship issued circular instructions for his being received by the Political Residents with the respect due to a British nobleman; ordering that he should be supplied at the public expence with whatever presents it might be deemed suitable for him to make. Lord Valentia having engaged that he would deposit with each Resident on the public account all the presents he should receive.

*B.* Is that a customary mode of proceeding? Is it not understood that you now refuse presents?

*W.* For ourselves most strictly. They have become at the courts a mere matter of form. The Residents are required to limit their annual presents to the value of what they annually receive: if the receipts be more they belong to the public: if

<sup>1</sup> N.B.—Of his attack on Bruce I know not what to say: he accuses that author of want of veracity in his surveys of the coasts of the Red Sea, whereas we know that in the Egyptian expedition our ships found Bruce to be their safest and best guide.



less, the deficiency falls on the private purse of the Resident, unless he can obtain the sanction of Government for bringing it to account.

*B.* And all that is really observed ?

*W.* Religiously.

*B.* And did Lord Valentia deliver to the Residents the presents he received ?

*W.* I cannot answer in the affirmative : because in some cases I know he did not.

*B.* In what cases ?

*W.* In my own. He seemed to be endeavouring to recollect my name in Lord Valentia, and I told him he would not find it there. I was, at the time of Lord Valentia's visit, with the Mysore troops on the frontier for purposes connected with the Duke of Wellington's operations in Decan, and deputed a friend (Major Symons) to do the honours and attend Lord Valentia if he should wish to visit the Rajah.<sup>1</sup>

*B.* Then you did not see him on that occasion ?

*W.* I never saw him. I corresponded with him and Mr. Salt on the subject of their several pursuits, and received their thanks for the satisfactory arrangements made for their conveyance and accommodation.

*B.* And did you understand that he paid much attention to natural history in his journey through Mysoor ?

*W.* Mr. Salt might. He remained to view the beautiful

<sup>1</sup> N.B.—Symons, in the simplicity of his heart, asked Lord Valentia for the presents he received from the Rajah. The suggestion was treated as a high indignity. The presents he gave were paid for *by me* and charged in the public account ; if the auditor had objected, a full explanation was ready. I was dissuaded by the D. of W. from making a formal report of the circumstance in the first instance.

falls of the Cavery : Lord Valentia travelled past, shut up in a box (a palankeen).

The sciences and arts of India passed next in rapid review, and the mention of indigo brought us back to the subject of chemistry. "Arts and manufactures," said he, "are its legitimate province, and it is destined to make as great a revolution in the affairs of the world as that already accomplished by the magnet. Before the discoveries of Vasco de Gama *pastel* was a valuable blue dye, and in France produced a considerable revenue to the State : it was supplanted by indigo, which at that period was found to be a better dye. Chemistry has restored the use of the European product, which is now prepared in France of a much better quality and lower price than the very best foreign indigo. *Sugar* is also now manufactured in France as good and as cheap from beet root (both red and white) as the best foreign sugar from the cane, and in 1814 a sufficiency was produced in France for the consumption of France." Observing an involuntary smile on my countenance he added : "I know that the idea has been ridiculed in England, and even in France it is but little understood or acknowledged : they fancy that the French sugar which they purchase is really imported from the West Indies, but I had the means of knowing the fact, and I also know that even in flavor they are not distinguishable from each other—latterly I made use of no other." I endeavoured to apologize for my smile by observing that "if they were still incredulous even in France, it was not wonderful that I should have been equally uninformed." He rested much on this part of the subject, which I think has been treated much in the same way in the *Moniteur* : he regretted that the dyeing



woods were still an article of import, but distinctly stated his expectation that France would become independent of foreign imports of every description. The conversation had already occupied, as I afterwards found, upwards of an hour and a half; and although he continued it with great animation and without the slightest pause, I thought it right to say now a second time that I feared I had been occupying too much of his time, and prepared to take my leave, instead of asking, as I should if I had remained, whether this independence of foreign supply would not tend directly to the decay of his naval power.

Every part of the conversation was considerably expanded, and merely the heads are noted above. In the course of the discussions on India he asked a variety of questions regarding the characters of Hyder and Tippoo, and the French troops who were in their service, which I answered without any reserve. He inquired whether I had seen his letter to Tippoo, to which I answered in the affirmative. He then asked whether I had seen Tippoo's letters to him, to which I replied that I did not know of the existence of such letters; if they did exist, the records were in the possession of our Government. I since find, from inspecting my notes, that Tippoo never received his letter, which was intercepted at Mocha, and there is reason to suppose that Tippoo never did write to him. His letter to Tippoo, beginning with, "You have already been informed of my arrival," is dated 7th Pluviose 7th year of the Republic, and these words may be understood to refer to a former letter: but if such letter had been received, or if Tippoo had written to him, we may conclude that Lord Mornington would not have failed to include letters so important in his collection of *Official documents* found at Seringapatam, and printed for the purpose of explaining and justifying the grounds of the war.

## II

### HEADS OF A CONVERSATION WITH BUONAPARTE.

21st April, 1816.

On the day preceding my visit to take leave of Buonaparte, Bertrand called upon me.

*Bertrand.* As the former Governor of the island, and intimately acquainted with every locality connected with our situation, would there be any impropriety in asking you to take charge of a communication from the Emperor to your Government; or would you consider such a charge to be troublesome?

*W.* Far from troublesome; and I shall be very happy to take charge of any communication from General Buonaparte which may be committed to me for that purpose by Sir Hudson Lowe.

*B.* [*Looking confused.*] And not otherwise?

*W.* Certainly not. I am sorry you should think it necessary to propose to any person a deviation from the prescribed channel of communication; and very sorry that you should think it proper to make such a proposition to me.

There were several other persons in the room, and he was attempting some explanation when other visitors interrupted the conversation.

I had in the course of the day a communication with Sir Hudson Lowe on the subject, and before going to Buonaparte next day I called at Bertrand's (in conformity to Sir H. Lowe's particular request) with the view of remonstrating with him on this kind of proceeding. He had gone to the Admiral's: but I saw Las Cases, with whom circumstances had brought me into some degree of intimacy. Among other arguments I observed to him that if anything could possibly induce the officer charged with their custody to adopt measures of further restraint it would be their attempts at concealed communication; that Sir Hudson Lowe was bound to transmit whatever representations Buonaparte might send, if even they conveyed complaints against himself; that if B. meant fairly, it was an unworthy distrust to seek for any other than the established channel of communication, or for the transmission of sealed papers, and as confidence usually generated confidence, so would distrust beget distrust, and all the unpleasant consequences which it involves. These observations led to a discussion of the question lately proposed to Sir G. Cockburn, whether he would transmit a sealed letter to the Prince Regent. Las Cases distinctly stated that the proposed letter contained no political matter, and had an exclusive reference to domestic affairs, of too much delicacy to be communicated to a third person. To which I could only reply, that neither the principles of the British Constitution, nor the nature of our relations to the State prisoner and to the powers of Europe respectively, could well admit of the Prince Regent holding communications with General Buonaparte that were to be concealed from his responsible ministers: that the officer charged with the important trust of his custody must necessarily be considered as possessing the confidence of his sovereign,

and if fit for his situation at all he was fit to be trusted with any communication however secret or delicate it might be. A great deal of bad argument only terminated in the conclusion that they would think otherwise in France; and after a short interval I was shown into Buonaparte. Four ladies were present during the conversation.

*B.* How fares the gout? I was sorry to hear of your late indisposition.

*W.* I am much obliged to you. I rejoice in being so much recovered as to be enabled to pay my respects to you before my departure from St. Helena.

*B.* You are about to embark for England, and I understand with mutual regret on your part and that of the islanders.

*W.* I have many motives for being pleased at returning to England, but they are certainly mixed with regret. The inhabitants have no pretension to brilliant talents or refined education, but I have found in them generally the better qualities of sincerity and probity.

*B.* In that respect I believe your conclusions to be just. You would be a bad channel for conveying my sentiments regarding the island; you would describe it as a Paradise—I as a Hell.

*W.* I hope to speak of men and things as I find them; and in describing St. Helena I should certainly not travel to either of these extremes.

*B.* Shall you see the Prince Regent on your return?

*W.* I hope to have the honor of paying my respects.

*B.* Do you wait upon him immediately on your arrival as a matter of duty?

*W.* No: as a matter of duty I wait on the ministers for Indian and Colonial affairs.

*B.* My ideas of your national character have lately undergone a considerable change. I see none of that bold independence of character which has been ascribed to the English. In your army and navy I recognize nothing but a blind and undistinguishing obedience, and a fear of your superiors greater than I have ever observed in nations the most stigmatized for servility.

*W.* We have no objection to the national imputation of being the most obedient soldiers in Europe: we are proud of being thought greatly afraid of violating our duties. In embracing the military profession we voluntarily relinquish a portion of our civil rights, and acknowledge in the one case the principle which in another we abhor—the doctrine of passive and unconditional obedience. See us in our brown coats, and I apprehend you will find no want of independence of character.

*B.* There is no man in France, for example, who, in charge of a prison or a dépôt, would refuse to transmit a sealed letter from a prisoner to his sovereign.

*W.* Nor in England, perhaps, in ordinary cases, and where the orders did not require all such letters to be open.

*B.* In France men are actuated by their feelings. In a recent instance, Marshal Marmont, as the papers inform you, disobeyed his orders in favor of Madame Ney.

*W.* And incurred his sovereign's displeasure accordingly. Marshal Marmont would not have ventured on such a step under some of the governments which have existed in France.

*B.* I cannot consider obedience as a sentiment, after my knowledge of the cruel and horrible corporal punishments which you inflict, and some of which I had an opportunity to observe on board the *Northumberland*. Instead of liberal subordination and rational authority there is more the appear-

ance of tyranny on one part and passive servility on the other.

*W.* If passive servility existed in the degree you suppose, severity would be unnecessary. Corporal punishment is a great, but, I fear, a necessary evil, unless, indeed, where shooting is substituted for flogging. Obedience is exacted for the purposes of discipline. The end must absolutely be attained, the means depend on the quality of the materials, as well as the hand that moulds them. A late traveller informs us that the officers in charge of dépôts for prisoners of war in France, consider one hundred English prisoners more difficult to manage than one thousand of any other nation: and in this hundred we should recognize three distinct characters—the Scotch, the English, and the Irish; ten of the last being as difficult to manage as fifty of the first, and I should distinctly say more difficult than a thousand Rajepoot sepoys.

*B.* I am entitled to pronounce from experience that every diversity of character may be managed without flogging. With the French I very rarely resorted to it. Before my day the character of the Italians was held to be impracticable for military purposes. I made them the very best soldiers in Europe. The Germans were held to be equally impracticable without the aid of the cane. Now the Germans whom I trained without the cane soon beat the Germans who were governed by dint of the cane.

*W.* I have no personal knowledge of the Italians: the Germans with whom I have served appeared to me to class with the Scotch as a tractable people: no person will deny that you discovered the means of making good soldiers of both. Timour announced as the first principle of government, that he kept his subjects suspended between their hopes and their



fears.”<sup>1</sup> The quantity of one will probably be in the inverse ratio of the other.

*B.* The difference resembles that of the Musselman and the Christian religion—mine was the Mohammedan paradise; yours the Christian hell—the one all hope; the other all fear.

*W.* But you know what manner of bridge leads to that paradise, and over what sort of gulf; there is extreme fear and extreme hope in your system as well as theirs.

*B.* But the hope is made to predominate.

*W.* Without the advantage of Mohammed’s fatality or his paradise for martyrs. Temporal considerations gave a new character to your army: no person before you was ever enabled to infuse so large a portion of hope into the motives of human conduct; and where hope is brilliant, fear is an unnecessary apparatus.

*B.* Exclusively of the hope to which you allude, it was my object to substitute the point of honor for the terror of punishment; and it is there that your system is defective.

(After some further explanations.)

*W.* In my return to England is there any commission I can offer to execute for books, or any similar object?

*B.* I am much obliged, but I hope it will not be necessary to trouble you. I have been disappointed regarding some expected books which are necessary for the purposes of my history.

*W.* I understand they have been ordered, and will soon arrive. I am glad to hear you speak of your history. Would it be discreet to ask when it may be expected to appear?

*B.* Not soon. It will be voluminous; but at whatever time it may be finished it must be a posthumous publication.

<sup>1</sup> He was much struck with this quotation and asked many questions regarding the work in which it is found.

It will contain too many truths for the present time : one cannot always speak plain matter-of-fact to men's faces. I have seen men in their real and their assumed characters, and shall develop both—what they affect to be, and what they are when they think themselves unobserved. The world has yet much instruction to receive ; it is still in its childhood.

*W.* It has been at school some thousands of years, and you have taught it some valuable lessons ; and every successive year evinces that it has still much to learn. The short period of your life recorded by yourself will be equivalent to the experience of many centuries.

*B.* During the suspension of my history I have been learning English, and have looked into your work, which I expect soon to be able to read and understand. You are, I hope, completing it, and will soon come down to my correspondence with Tippoo.

*W.* I am approaching that period.

*B.* Is the oppressive system to be continued in this island of excluding private ships ? What is the use of it ? Where is the justice of admitting some and excluding others ? Making a distinction between the ships of the Company and those of individual merchants.

*W.* I am not aware of any intention to change the present system. Looking merely to security it may, perhaps, be thought that we have done either too much or too little, while we admit any merchant ships or exclude any ; but the question has other bearings unnecessary to discuss.

*B.* It is a barbarous arrangement. Lately a private ship was fired at to compel her to depart ; and she nevertheless stood on ; the master declaring that he would prefer being sunk to perishing for want of water.



*W.* I rather think you have been misinformed: cases of that kind are always exaggerated: before the existence of the causes for the present arrangements, any ship attempting to pass the batteries without observing the prescribed forms would be fired at.

*B.* It was not a battery but the *Northumberland*, and it accords with the *brusque* unfeeling conduct of that department of your service, which appears to me to be very ill administered.

*W.* Our navy is not noted among ourselves for peculiar gentleness of manner; but it has served our purposes tolerably well.

*B.* The system of both your army and navy in giving authority to boys and almost children over veterans, is radically faulty.

*W.* Nay, there I must take the liberty of quoting yourself against yourself. If we are not misinformed, it was your constant practice to promote young officers over the heads of their seniors.

*B.* Uniformly, as the reward of merit and distinguished talents, and never otherwise.

*W.* A similar reason would be assigned for our promotions, but I dare not say that it would always be the true one. At the head of your own armies it will readily be admitted that your selections were generally good.

*B.* Say rather that your selections are made not for the merit of the individual, but the interest of his friends. I have studied your constitution; it is anything but a free and popular system. I can assure you that in the zenith of my power I was necessarily more influenced by public opinion in France than your statesmen usually appear to be in your boasted land of freedom. Your Government is a downright aristocracy.

*W.* So we sometimes hear from our Parliamentary opposition; but the same members change their tone when they have achieved their purpose of becoming themselves the ministers. Moderate and reflecting men rejoice at these conflicting opinions, which have a tendency to preserve the balance of the constitution. Our aristocracy only resembles the rest of mankind. It seems to be a pretty universal tendency in every country for public men to grasp the greatest quantity of power they can possibly get.

*B.* [*Smiling, and evidently understanding the remark to be applied to himself:*] I may admit that fact, without approving your civil or military system; the latter of which, even some among yourselves admit to be barbarous. It was lately proposed in Parliament to determine whether flogging was necessary. Parliament refused to entertain the question, and they did well. For there was a preliminary question which ought to have been decided, whether the punishers and the punished were of the same class of beings, that one should be universally exempt from the barbarities they inflict on the other, and whether there be an insuperable barrier between these classes which no merit can ever surmount.

*W.* There is no distinction of human beings more intelligible than that of the educated and uneducated. Your conscription placed in the ranks a large proportion of men qualified by education to rise to the highest command. Our army is differently composed, our privates being generally uneducated; but it is an error to suppose that the barrier is insurmountable. I could in this little garrison present to you probably twenty commissioned officers who have risen from the ranks.

*B.* You are an excellent advocate for tyranny, contrary to

your own practice. You can tell that both obedience and attachment can be secured without flogging.

*W.* I understand the allusion. It is true that in the first year of my government I diminished the number of corporal punishments one half, and that they have continued to decrease.

*B.* And yet the conduct of your men is said to be decidedly improved, and your Government to be applauded by all ranks.

*W.* I should nevertheless not approve the absolute prohibition of corporal punishments. You admit them to be occasionally necessary in the French service, and I contend for no more in the English. The best disciplined corps have always the least flogging.

The discussion had now continued near an hour, many minor observations being omitted, when, after some lighter conversation on other subjects, I proposed to take my leave, and he concluded with complimentary wishes for my health, an agreeable voyage, &c.





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